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THE NEW ARCTIC EL DORADO.

KLONDIKE AND THE GREATEST OF GOLD-RUSHES.

BY HENRY WYSHAM LANIER.

THE little Thron-Diuck ("Plenty of Fish") River, a thousand miles west of San Francisco and far up under the shadow of the arctic circle, has shown that the huge "chowichie" and the white-fish, whose abundance made it known to the annually half-starved Indian, are a most insignificant item in its resources, and the fame of its golden sands has sped to every corner of the civilized world. Two years ago the average man's knowledge of the great Northwest was limited to the fact that we owned a lot of frozen land up there called Alaska, whose glacier scenery attracted a few ship-loads of tourists every summer and about the boundaries of which there was a dispute with Canada. To-day it would be hard to find any one who has not heard of the Klondike, Bonanza, and Too Much Gold Creeks, the Stewart and Hootalinqua Rivers, Dawson City, and all the other names with which our newspapers and magazines have been flooded. And there has been ample cause for this sudden accession of interest. Within two months after the *Excelsior* brought down the first half million in the summer of 1897 these new placer fields had produced nearly five million dollars' worth of gold—a record beside which the Australian excitement of 1851 and the California stampede of 1849 alike sink to insignificance.

It is a strange land which contains this golden magnet—a mountainous land where



ENTRANCE TO QUEEN CHARLOTTE SOUND, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

the ground below the yellow-green moss and the gray lichens—often a foot thick—is never thawed for a depth of more than two feet, even when the fierce heat of the twelve weeks' summer sends the thermometer up to a hundred degrees in the shade. For eight or nine months every stream is locked with an icy covering, and the snow lies thick over the whole country. Then comes the dreaded "poorgas," when the thermometer drops to sixty or seventy below zero and the blizzardy wind dashes the snow into one's face and eyes "like hot shot"; and when the sun does shine it is with a feeble paleness.

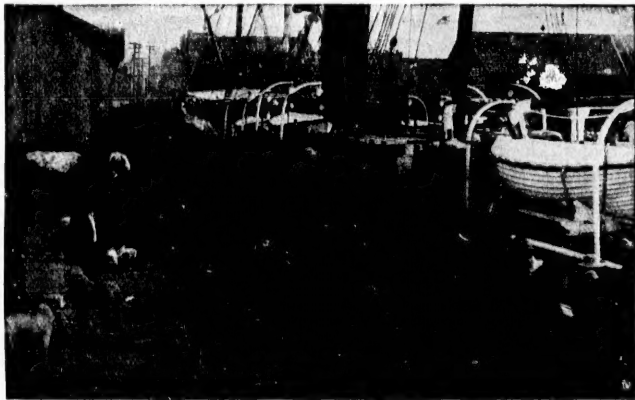
The day lasts two hours and the night is a twilight. At sunrise and sunset in the autumn and early winter, however, the clouds are lit with wonderful hues and the desolate bleakness of the

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cold season is somewhat allayed by the glorious auro-ras. From September till March "luminous waves and radii of pulsating rose, purple, green, and blue flames light up and dance about the heavens—gorgeous arches of yellow bands and pencil-points of crimson fire are hung and glitter in the zenith." In the hot, moist summer the moss is dotted with flowers: phlox and blue iris, white and yellow poppies, red-flowered saxifrage, broad-leaved Archangelica, and over all ferns and the fleecy white plumes of the Equisetum grasses. With the heat comes also countless swarms of mosquitoes, horse-flies, and gnats, so vicious

and pestilential that they have been known to drive the wild animals into the water for refuge. There are regions where the dogs, woolly-haired as they are, cannot survive the attacks of these little plagues, and where the natives do not dare to walk through the woods in midsummer, wrapping up their heads with cloths and skins and wearing thick mittens whenever they go out into the open air.

"The traveler who exposes his bare face



STEAMSHIP "ALKI" LOADING FOR ALASKA.



VIEW OF JUNEAU, FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP.

at this time of the year will speedily lose his natural appearance: his eyelids swell up and close; his neck expands in fiery pimples, so that no collar he ever wore before can now be fastened around it, while his hands simply become as two carbuncled balls." This is one, and the disagreeable, side of the picture. On the other hand, the veteran Joseph Ladue declares he has chopped wood in his shirt-sleeves when the thermometer was seventy degrees below zero without feeling particularly uncomfortable, and many travelers have witnessed to the exhilarating and bracing effects of the dry cold along the Upper Yukon and in the mountain passes. And, more than all, and a consideration that blots out the hardships with a golden haze, it is in this land that George Carmack (Carmack or McCormack) made the lucky strike which drew to Dawson City first every prospector along the Yukon and speedily thereafter thousands from all over the world.

Alaskan gold is by no means a new thing. The existence of the precious metal there has been known for fully fifty years, and since 1880 the mines near Juneau have been continuously and profitably worked. A year after the

excitement over Juneau's discovery gold was found on the Big Salmon River and a few hardy prospectors made their way into the Yukon country. They did not meet with any very instant success, and in 1883 there were but thirteen white men in the whole region. These indefatigable pioneers persisted, and before long Forty Mile Creek, Sixty Mile and Birch Creeks, and the Koyukuk River had each in succession been the cause of a "stampede" from the previous diggings. In

1893 new discoveries increased the population of Forty Mile to a thousand besides the men in camp at Circle City, close to where the river crosses the arctic circle two hundred miles further down.

To these men came the news in August, 1896, that "Stick George" Cormack with a couple of Indians had panned out \$1,200 in eight days on Bonanza Creek, a little tributary of the Klondike. The news spread as such tidings do, and in a few weeks Circle City and Forty Mile Creek



MAIN STREET, SLAGUAY.

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were practically deserted. At first the older hands doubted the truth of the report; they had been deceived very often and this was entirely new territory, which had been passed by as altogether unpromising. In this way it happened that a number of the best claims were obtained by "cheechacoos" (tenderfeet), but with the confirmation of the wild rumors even the paying diggings were forsaken in the mad fear lest the luck should pass them by. Joseph Ladue staked out a town site at the junction of the Klondike with the Yukon and put up the first house in September, 1896.

In less than six months Dawson City, as it was called, had over five hundred houses, including hotels, restaurants, saloons, and stores.

The news reached the Pacific coast in due time, but the knowing ones had heard too many Alaskan gold lies to get up any very general enthusiasm. People did get to talking, however, after Mr. Ogilvie's report to the Canadian government, and then in the summer of 1897 the *Excelsior* and the *Portland* sailed into port, the former with half a million, largely from Forty Mile Creek and Circle City, the latter with some seven hundred thousand dollars' worth

of gold and six of the lucky prospectors from the Klondike. The ecstatic lavishness of one of these grizzled old chaps, who was so overcome that he hurled handfuls of small nuggets into the crowd, was hardly necessary to start the blaze of excitement. From this time to the end of the year nearly nine thousand gold-hunters went north from the coast cities and about half of them got through to the promised land, 1,200 going by the all-water route to St. Michael's, near the mouth of the Yukon, while about 3,600 managed to cross the mountain barrier by the Chilkoot, Skaguay, and Dalton trails.

Since the first of the year the number leaving Portland and Seattle has been limited only by the capacity of the vessels, and there seems every probability that more than a hundred thousand people will attempt to reach the new placer-fields during 1898. When one realizes that fifteen years ago the population of the entire Yukon Valley, which with its tributaries comprises over half a million square miles, was about a dozen white and less than two thousand Indians; when one remembers further that it took nearly three years to add a hundred thou-



A BAKERY "ON THE TRAIL."

sand miners to the population of California in 1849, the magnitude of this vast movement will be better appreciated.

The air has been full of projects for railroads to the Klondike region, and a contract has actually been made by the Canadian government which will probably secure better communication before very long. But four-million-dollar roads are not constructed in a month, and the man who wishes to do any prospecting on the Upper Yukon in 1898 must leave Puget Sound by April or May, whether he goes by St. Michael's or by one of the passes, so the

various (paper) lines along the Stickeen, Edmonton, Taku, or Dalton routes are not especially helpful just yet.

By the all-water route the traveler ships



ICEBERGS ON THE BEACH AT JUNEAU.

to St. Michael's, four thousand miles from San Francisco, and is there transferred to a shallow-draft steamer for the journey of nearly two thousand miles up stream to Dawson. Seven weeks is a fair allowance for the journey, so that the first of August is the earliest date at which one could hope to reach prospecting ground. This leaves but a couple of weeks of the season in which to get settled, for the weather makes preliminary operations almost impossible after the middle or end of August. Against this fact is to be placed the comparative ease of the journey.

The land routes—or practically all the feasible ones—start from Dyea and Skaguay at the head of Lynn Canal. (The trails from Juneau up the Taku River to Lake Teslin and then down the Hootalinqua, and the one from Wrangell which follows the Stickeen to Telegraph Creek and thence overland one hundred and fifty-four miles to Lake Teslin are out of the question for

pedestrians, although perfectly possible for railroads.) There has been in some time a section of overhead tramway in operation along the Chilkoot route from Dyea and a

more extensive project of the same sort is being pushed to completion and may help to solve the transportation problem during the spring and summer. From Skaguay there is a road across the White Pass, more difficult than the Chilkoot, but now being put into condition for the spring traffic. There is also the "Jack Dalton" trail, which crosses the Chilkoot Pass and joins the other routes at Fort Selkirk; if one has pack animals which are to be disposed of further on this is perhaps the best route of all. It is significant, however, that nearly three thousand of the thirty-six hundred

prospectors who "got through" in 1897 went across the Chilkoot Pass.

By whatever route the gold-hunter makes his attempt he should carry with him supplies for at least a year. Upon this point, as upon the necessity of having an outfit of the best quality obtainable, there is unanimity of opinion among the most violent supporters of the different "trails." Of course this question must be decided largely by individual preference, but the typical outfit of clothing supplied by the dealers at Seattle, Portland, Juneau, etc., who make a specialty of such goods runs as follows:

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|-------------------------|--|
| 2 pairs blankets | 3 suits underwear |
| 3 heavy sweaters | 1 pair rubber boots (with leather soles) |
| 1 pair high shoes | |
| 1 " trousers (corduroy) | 1 suit mackinaws |
| 2 pairs felt boots | 1 leather-lined corduroy coat |
| 1 corduroy hat | 6 pairs heavy socks |
| 1 flannel-lined hood | 1 pair unlined gloves |
| 1 heavy cap | 4 pairs medium socks |
| 2 pairs overalls | 1 pair rubber mittens |
| 2 jumpers | 1 " wristlets |
| 1 pack strap | 1 " moccasins |
| 6 towels | 1 " leather suspenders |
| 1 money belt | 1 sleeping bag |
| | 1 canvas tent. |

These will cost about \$140 to \$150 and should in every case be good if bought at all. The men who have made the trip declare that it is better to leave out some things which seem necessary than to burden one's self with what is not going to be really useful.

The travelers must carry also a full set of prospecting and mining implements, and take along either a boat "knocked down" or the tools with

which to build one on the lake shores for the trip down stream. With a year's provisions, hardware, and cooking utensils one's luggage amounts to the formidable total of a couple of thousand pounds. It is this fact, of course, which makes all the trouble in the journey. With all the perpendicular rise of the last thousand feet between Sheep Camp and the summit of the Chilkoot, an ordinarily active pedestrian would find little trouble in making the pas-

sage but for this mass of supplies. They put him at the mercy of the Indian packers, whose prices rise with the demand to the most exorbitant rates (three or four hundred dollars was a common price for transportation over this thirty miles last season), and who were entirely unequal to the task of keeping the trail clear. Moreover, even this precarious means fails at the first breath of winter, for the Siwash has no love for packing through the snow, and there have

been during the last six months several thousand pilgrims camped at Dyea and Skaguay, unable to advance over the snow-bound route.

When the miner has reached the scene of operation and decided where to try his chances, the experts say the newcomer will do better to strike out for himself instead of making for the already overcrowded region just about Dawson. Having found "pay dirt," he will need a little special knowledge of the mining laws not to get himself into trouble. All the late discoveries have been in Canadian territory, where the following



PACKING LUMBER OVER CHILKOOT PASS.



CHURCH AT JUNEAU.

laws are in force for placer-mining—the only sort attempted as yet in the Yukon region:

For "bar diggings" the claim shall be a strip of land one hundred feet wide at high-water mark and extending along the river to its lowest water-level—bar diggings being defined to mean any part of a river over which water extends in flood seasons but not at low water. The sides of such a claim are two parallel lines at right angles to the stream, marked by four posts, one at each end at high-water mark and one at each end at the water's edge. One of the posts must contain the miner's name and the date of staking.

For "dry diggings"—mines over which a river never extends—the claim is limited to one hundred feet square, marked at each corner as described above.

"Creek and river claims" are five hun-



INDIAN GRAVEYARD AT JUNEAU.

dred feet in length, measured along the stream, and extend from base to base of the hills on each side (or from "bench" to "bench"); except that when the benches are more than six hundred feet apart the width is limited to that size, and when the benches are less than one hundred feet apart the width may be extended to one hundred feet, to be marked as above.

Within sixty days the claim must be recorded at the nearest law office and a fee of \$15 is required for registry, with an annual fee thereafter of \$100. The government proposes to collect a ten-per-cent royalty on all returns of less than \$500 a week, twenty per cent on greater returns—when the police force is adequate!

If the claim is the first on this particular stream the four-inch boundary stakes (eighteen inches in the ground and eighteen inches above) are marked "O." The next claim going up stream is "one above"; the next below is "one below," and so on. The

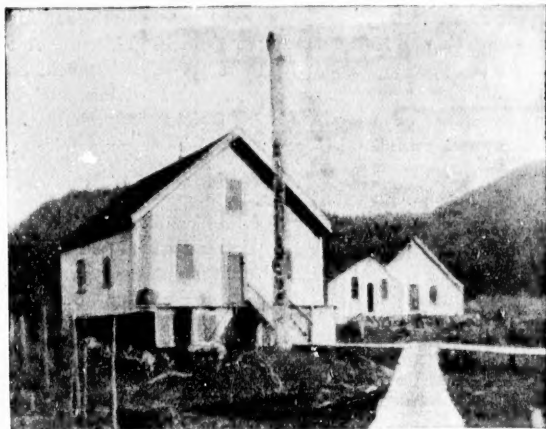


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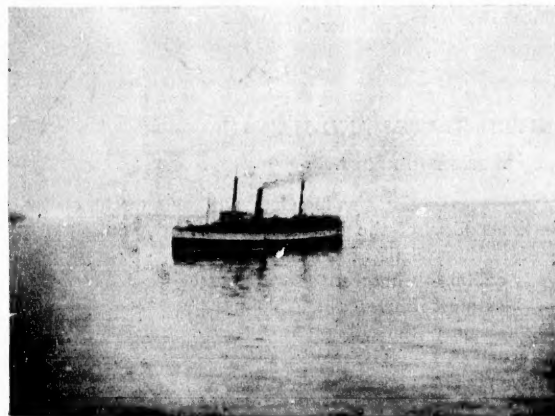
claims between the "forties below" and the "forties above" are the only ones in which the miner has any right to count with reason upon ever sharing at all in the original discoverer's luck. For the "pay streak" is by no means always under the stream bed. The theory has been advanced that the former is the bed of an old glacier which has brought down the gold; at any rate, its course widens and deepens without much regard for the present water-course. As a rule the miner strikes first a stratum of frozen muck from four to thirty feet deep; next comes a layer of rubble averaging three or four feet, then a thin layer of dirt or clay, sometimes not more than a foot thick, and beneath this, resting on the bed rock, lies the golden streak, sometimes so rich that the "nuggets and flakes of gold have to be mixed with dirt to be sluiced." Ordinarily, however, the pay dirt is thrown up on the dump during the winter, the frozen ground being thawed with fires. In the spring this frozen heap soon melts and can be shoveled into the sluice-boxes, where the dirt and gravel are washed off, the

heavier gold sinking to the bottom and being caught by the cross cleats.

Of course gold-dust is the universal currency, at the rate of seventeen dollars or more, and the precious yellow grains are stored and carried in all sorts of receptacles, from a buckskin bag to a rubber boot. It is very significant of the absorption in the business of gold-hunting that life and property are by all accounts as safe in



INDIAN MISSION AND TOTEM-POLE.



STEAMSHIP "CORONA," WRECKED WHILE RETURNING FROM ALASKA.

Dawson as in New York. All the miners agree in their stories of fortunes being kept in crazy little "shacks," of the swift punishment meted out to the "claim-jumper," and of the uselessness of firearms.

Gambling and drinking are the chief pastimes, but the feeling that each man is a potential millionaire seems to be more efficacious in inspiring order and respect for one another's property than some thousands of years of civilization have been. It is a strangely picturesque development; men becoming law-abiding from an access of the very causes which have so often sufficed to drive them to crime.

There have been no lack of Jeremiads preached on the subject of this arctic Pactolus. Reports that the claims were all taken, that there had been no new placer discoveries since the first rush, and that the whole Yukon settlement was on the verge of starvation have alternated with graphic descriptions of the hardships and dangers awaiting the prospector before he can even reach the mining region. The scientific experts, too, have declared that nine out of ten of the men who try their fortunes would do far better physically, morally, and financially by staying at home. It is, moreover, estimated that the vast army of prospectors, the vanguard of which is now starting Alaska-ward, will spend in 1898 some sixty millions of dollars—to produce one fourth of that amount. But all these arguments are as vain babble in the ears of the Argonaut. He has seen or known or read of the men who took five thousand dollars out of forty square feet in Claim No. 30; of the sixty-two thousand dollars that came from twenty-four square feet in El Dorado Claim 13; of Mrs. Lippi and Mrs. Berry, who poked six thousand dollars out of a discarded dump in a few days, while one of the men of their party secured a million-dollar claim; of the man who took seven hundred dollars out of one pan of dirt—and so on through a crescendo of fact and fiction. With his mind set on these things he heeds discouraging talk not half so much as he does the mosquitoes. Give him any item of infor-

mation about the Klondike, or anything Alaskan, however incorrect, and his attention is yours, but to all else he is deaf.

There is some foundation for this. Certainly the successful prospectors so far have owed their good fortune to apparently blind chance, and no one need hesitate from inexperience when luck is the ruling factor. But it is undeniable that any man not in first-class physical condition and who has not at least seven or eight hundred dollars will be more than foolish to set his face toward the Yukon. A thousand dollars is not a bit too much, but if the gold-seeker is very determined it is really possible by working for others to save up enough money in a few weeks after reaching Dawson to purchase an outfit. Unskilled labor always commands ten dollars a day, and an able mechanic can easily secure anywhere from fifteen to thirty. Since it is possible for a strong and healthy man to live with an expenditure of three to five hundred a year such wages as these leave a handsome margin.

Whatever may be the immediate results of the tremendous influx of miners into these Alaskan and Northwest Territory regions there is no doubt whatever but that this hitherto desolate portion of our continent is entering upon a new and most striking phase of development, and he would be a bold prophet who would venture to picture the state of affairs along the mighty Yukon in another decade or two.